

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
MCT-01 HA-05 ACDA-12 /077 W
-----078124 220230Z /64

P R 210522Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7284
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1554

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, SY
SUBJECT: ASSAD RELATIVE GUNNED DOWN

1. IBRAHIM N'AAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE SYRIAN SYNDICATE OF DENTISTS AND A RELATIVE OF PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD, WAS GUNNED DOWN OUTSIDE HIS DAMASCUS CLINIC AT 1600 ON MARCH 18, N'AAMA, AN ALAWITE FROM THE PRESIDENT'S VILLAGE OF QURDAHA, ACCORDING TO SYRIAN MEDIA REPORTS, WAS A MEMBER OF THE 1975 BAATH REGIONAL CONGRESS AND HELD SEVERAL IMPORTANT POSITIONS, INCLUDING DIRECTOR OF THE DAMASCUS HOSPITAL AND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE SYRIAN-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY. THE MURDER FOLLOWS CLOSELY A SIMILAR INCIDENT IN ALEPPO (DAMASCUS 1253) IN WHICH AN ALAWITE OPHTHAMOLOGIST WHO WAS A RELATIVE OF A SENIOR ALAWITE GENERAL WAS MURDERED.

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2. ACCORDING TO PRESS, N'AAMA'S CLINIC WAS IN SHUHADAA', NORMALLY A CROWDED AREA OF DAMASCUS DURING THAT TIME OF DAY, AND WE UNDERSTAND A POLICE STATION IS LOCATED NEARBY. DESPITE THIS, A LOCAL STRINGER WITH SECURITY CONTACTS TELLS US THAT, SEVERAL MEN IN A CAR PARKED OUTSIDE HIS CLINIC SHOT HIM AND SPED AWAY.

3. ATTESTING TO N'AAMA'S IMPORTANCE WAS A FUNERAL LED BY MORE PROMINENT SYRIAN OFFICIALS THAN ANY SINCE DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY RECTOR AL-FADIL WAS SLAIN IN FEBRUARY 1977. AMONG THOSE REPORTED ACCOMPANYING THE BODY TO THE DAMASCUS OUTSKIRTS ON ITS WAY TO QURDAHA WERE BAATH PARTY DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL AL-AHMAR, REGIONAL COMMAND SECRETARY BAJBUJ, PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI, PROGRESSIVE NATIONAL FRONT COMMAND MEMBERS, BAATH PARTY LUMINARIES, HEADS OF PROFESSIONAL AND POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS, AND MEMBERS OF THE MEDICAL ESTABLISHMENT.

4. WHO KILLED HIM? EVEN THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT HAS NOT AS YET MADE ANY OFFICIAL ACCUSATIONS, CONTENTING ITSELF WITH LABELING THEM AS CRIMINALS SERVING THE ENEMIES OF THE NATION. PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD'S PRESS SECRETARY IN PRIVATE HAS ACCUSED IRAQ OF STAGING THE MURDERS. OTHERS ARE NOT SO SURE AND RUMORS ARE RIFE ABOUT THE PERPETRATORS. SOME OF THE THEORIES MENTIONED ARE THAT THE KILLINGS ARE REVENGE FOR THE SEPTEMBER 1976 HANGINGS OF PALESTINIANS WHO HELD HOSTAGES IN THE SEMIRAMIS HOTEL; INTRA-REGIME AND INTRA-ALAWITE RIVALRIES; AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD (HIS SOVIET CONNECTION AND THE DEDICATION OF THE SOVIET-BUILT TABQA DAM ON THE SAME DAY FIGURE INTO THIS).

5. NO MATTER WHO IS RESPONSIBLE, THESE KILLINGS OF PROMINENT CONFIDENTIAL

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ALAWITES RELATED TO THE ASSAD CLAN OR OTHERWISE CLOSE TO THE REGIME OBVIOUSLY HAVE AN UNSETTLING AFFECT ON ALL REGIME PERSONALITIES AND SEEM DESIGNED TO HEIGHTEN SECTARIAN TENSIONS AND PROVOKE UNPOPULAR AND REPRESSIVE MEASURES. IT SEEMS REASONABLE TO CONCLUDE THAT ALL OF THESE SIMILAR UNSOLVED MURDERS OF PROMINENT ALAWITES HAVE BEEN PERPETRATED BY THE SAME GROUP. THUS FAR, ASSAD HAS NOT BEEN PROVOKED AND, IN FACT, ANNOUNCED SOME RELAXATION IN THE SCOPE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MARTIAL LAW IN HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF MARCH 8. WHETHER HE CAN CONTINUE THIS COURSE IN THE FACE OF SUCH SOPHISTICATED ASSASSINATIONS REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
MURPHY

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ASSASSINATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DAMASC01554
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780125-0512
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780344/aaaabkwb.tel
Line Count: 106
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 7ada60c3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3260049
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ASSAD RELATIVE GUNNED DOWN
TAGS: PINT, SY, (N\AAMA, IBRAHIM)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/7ada60c3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014